

Sen. Ben Nelson on Monday fired back at partisan criticism that health care reform legislation somehow represents a government takeover.

"It is totally 100 percent private" except for expansion of the current Medicaid program, Nelson told 100 Nebraska high school students.

"It opens up markets in the private insurance industry" for uninsured Americans, he said.

"There is no reason to believe or fear this will morph into a public plan," he said.

Nelson said he "worked hard to make certain there was no public option in the bill."

Nebraska's Democratic senator, who has been under attack for his vote in support of the Senate bill, addressed a youth forum at the Capitol sponsored by the Nebraska Humanities Council in collaboration with Secretary of State John Gale.

Republican Reps. Lee Terry and Adrian Smith also spoke to the students from 26 high schools.

Nelson was the only member of Nebraska's congressional delegation to support the health care reform legislation.

Smith, who represents western and central Nebraska's 3rd District, said the legislation is "very costly (and) it's a bill Nebraskans don't want."

"It's a monster," he said.

"The more government is involved," Smith said, "the more expensive health

care has become."

Terry said some Nebraskans will benefit from the bill, "but far more will pay higher taxes and higher health care premiums, probably for less care."

The issue is "who's going to control medicine," the 2nd District congressman said.

Terry represents metropolitan Omaha.

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